



## Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota

*In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies to overcome hunger and poverty, and steward God's creation!*

# The 2026 Lutheran Letter Campaign

## We Need YOU!

**We need you – your congregation, campus, youth group, confirmation class, WELCA group, church committee, or whatever – to write letters** and be in contact with your Minnesota state representative and senator! It is in relationship with their constituents that our legislators know what we care about, and why.

Your group's action will accomplish what our Lutheran Advocacy-MN staff cannot. Staff can help those in your group be effective citizen advocates. Staff can also follow up with legislators, but **it is their own constituents that representatives and senators REALLY want to hear from.**

## Lutheran Tradition

We know the challenges our world faces! The Lutheran tradition is steeped in both Christ's care for the marginalized and Luther's active, disruptive stance against injustice and exploitation. We have a long history of bringing the radical love of Jesus to people and places that are neglected and forgotten, speaking truth to power, and welcoming those who society has left behind.

We are, as beloved children of God, called to be good stewards of the gift of creation, to be a voice for those who have had their voices stifled, and to advocate for our neighbor regardless of who that neighbor is. In a world that seeks to divide us, to hide our light under a bushel, the love of God binds us to one another irrevocably and makes us bearers of a light that cannot be covered.

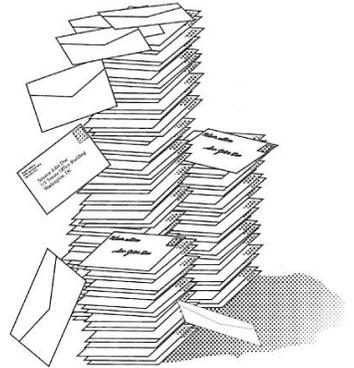
With this as our foundation, being God's hands and feet to the world becomes a lifestyle we cannot resist living. Whether we are worshipping within the walls of our churches, serving our communities, or writing to our legislators, this deep love disrupts our patterns of division and gives us common ground on which to stand. Most importantly, we must remember that this is not our work but God's work through us to draw us, and all of creation, toward resurrection and restoration.

## Using This Resource

There are three issues covered in the following pages.

- 1) **Food Security** – With dramatic cuts to our nation's primary nutrition program, Minnesota will need to find ways to fill the gaps and ensure that people will have what they need.
- 2) **Electronic Waste Recycling** – Seventy percent of the toxins in our landfills are from electronic waste, even though it is only 1-2% of the total waste stream.
- 3) **Ethical Immigration Enforcement** – Minnesota has just experienced 3000 federal agents across our state, many of whom were not trained in basic law enforcement nor the laws they are enforcing. The disruptions in immigrant communities have impacted livelihoods.

**Print the pages of the issues** you are addressing in your Offering of Letters, Advocacy Circle, meeting, or gathering. Individual issue PDFs are available on our website where you will want to scroll down and click on Current Campaigns. Print also the page with how our faith speaks to this advocacy action and the impactful tips for writing letters. **Provide notecards** or stationery, and pens, and put all the materials on tables designated for letter-writing (or in the pew if you are writing as part of worship). Put out a basket for collection of the letters and provide stamps. **Invite the Holy Spirit** into your letter writing. Then **consider following up** your letter activity with an in-person or Zoom meeting with your legislator. There are also several suggestions of various ways to continue to influence legislators on page 3.



# Faith and Civic Action

## Advocacy *(Our advocacy seeks to influence public policy toward justice for all that God has created)*



Advocacy, as defined by the dictionary, is “to speak or plead on behalf of another.” We ourselves are beneficiaries of advocacy. Jesus is our advocate (1 John 2:1), as is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

Throughout history, we see examples of God’s people acting as advocates by calling upon their leaders to act justly and protect the most vulnerable. Moses was an advocate for his people with Pharaoh, who was the most powerful political leader of his day. The Old Testament prophets were consistent advocates as they called the leaders and the people back to right relationship with God, which includes seeking justice.

Motivated by God’s love for us, we carry on that tradition. We can share a vision of the world as God wants it to be and help shape the laws and policies that define how we live together in God’s world. We can contact our leaders and lift our voices with, and for, those whose voice is not usually heard in the halls of power. Advocacy is an extension of the church’s practice of loving our neighbors and being good stewards of God’s creation.

## Justice in the Bible

Did you know that the words for justice and righteousness in many languages are the same? They refer to right relationship – right relationship with God (righteousness) and right relationship with others, between nations, and among all that God has created (justice). Unfortunately, in English we have frequently lost the sense that those two words are intricately intertwined. We also forget when we read those words that we are supposed to be thinking about what needs to happen to restore relationships with God and with others. Keep that in mind as you write your letters about issues and policies. How can these policies help restore right order in God’s world?

## Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for loving the world so very deeply. Help us to see the brokenness that now mars what you created as perfect, and the struggles of people you created in your image. Help us to reflect your love by loving and serving our neighbors and our vulnerable planet. Please help us be your advocacy ambassadors, bravely lifting our voices with, and for, those whose wellbeing is threatened. Give us the right words to share with our leaders, so that they, too, may see and hear and understand the brokenness, as well as how you are calling them to respond. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

# What is Needed for a Good Advocacy Letter?



As you try to get the attention of your legislators, you’ll want to **use your own words** and **personalize** your letter as much as possible. They want to know what YOU think. **Notecards** or **stationery** can make the letter feel even more personal. A simple personalized letter, note, or email is usually worth more than hundreds of form letters. Contact Lutheran Advocacy-MN for updates and bill numbers (as available) or check the website for additional resources. **\*\*[Who Represents Me? <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>]\*\***

## A good letter will also include the following elements:

- 1) Your Name & Address on Envelope & Letter:** Legislators want to know that you are their constituent and where you live (or where you go to church, if you are writing to the legislator from that district).
- 2) Who You Are:** Mention something about yourself, like what church you are from, and if you have first-hand experience with the issue.
- 3) Ask for Specific Action:** “Please support...” If there is a bill number, this is the place to include it.
- 4) Give a Reason or Say Something About Why You Care:** Speak from your heart, elaborate from the talking points, or tell a story.

## Mail the letters to these addresses:

Sen. \_\_\_\_\_, Minnesota State Senate, MN Senate Building, 95 University Ave. W., St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. \_\_\_\_\_, Minnesota House of Representatives, 100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55155

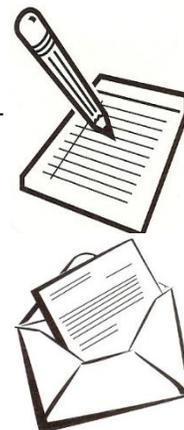
# Many Ways to Make an Impact

**Find your Minnesota legislator:** <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>  
**Find Minnesota Legislative Committee Members:** <leg.mn.gov/leg/committees>

## Letters to Legislators *(including email letters)*

**We need you** – your **congregation, campus, youth group, confirmation class, WELCA group, church committee**, or whatever – **to be in contact with your Minnesota state representative and senator!** Letter-writing is one of the **most accessible ways for many people to participate** in advocacy action. Letter campaigns begin to create relationships with legislators, and it is in relationship with their constituents that our legislators know what we care about, and why.

Letters can be written during a special time in worship, before or after a meal, as part of a forum or in small groups. It is effective to collect the letters as an offering to God, and to pray that legislators will be moved by them. Remember that we do this as part of our faith, acting as God's advocacy ambassadors for love of neighbor and creation. Notecards, rather than big impersonal pieces of paper, help make the letters/notes feel more personal to the legislator and assist in the relationship-building process. **Use the following pages, which can be printed back-to-back by issue, to organize letter offerings with your group.** Or send the pages out in advance and encourage people to bring their letters to your next meeting or gathering to dedicate them jointly.



## Phone Calls & Emails



When **events are unfolding quickly**, phone calls to legislators are an easy and effective way to take action. With a couple days leeway, emails can also be a quick way to reach legislators. Lutheran Advocacy-MN provides **Action Alerts** that include the **Action requested**, the **Main Message**, and various **Talking Points**. The caller (or emailer) is encouraged to choose one or two points or share briefly why they care about the issue. Usually, a message can be left with a staff person. Ask them to record your contact information and tell them you want to know later what the legislator did on the issue; instead of just being a “for” or “against” mark in their tally, the communication may have more of an impact.

## Meetings with Lawmakers *(in-person or virtual)*

**Magnify the impact of letters or emails** by arranging a group visit with your legislator(s). Our leaders want to hear from us and they rely on us to help inform them on issues that are pertinent to their districts. Constituent visits have been identified as the **single most influential way to make a difference** on an issue. When it is possible to refer to several previously written letters and emails by your group, the visit is even more powerful.



## Letters to the Editor

If you can write a letter to your legislators, you can also write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Tie your comments to a recent article. Letters to the editor need to be very short and concise—no more than 200-300 words. The first sentence should engage readers immediately.



## Social Media

Tagging legislators on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Blue Sky, or other platforms can be a good way to get their attention. Also, thank you messages can be helpful in relationship building. Photos of a person with a brief, specific action or message written on a whiteboard can be a very effective post – be sure to include your first name, last initial, and the community you're from.

## Thank Legislators

Most important – Don't Forget to thank legislators when they support the position you advocate, or if they take time to meet with you and your group. This helps build relationships!

# Issue: SNAP Cuts & Food Security

## Overview:

Federal legislation signed July 4, 2025, makes ***the largest cuts in history to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), reducing benefits, removing eligibility for some households, increasing red tape, and shifting major costs to states.*** The result: more people struggling to afford food and new financial pressure on states.

## Why SNAP Matters

- More than **440,000** people in MN rely on SNAP, including children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.
- **63%** are in families with children. Almost 2/3 have incomes below poverty line (about **\$32,000/year** for family of four).
- Benefits average about **\$5 per person per day**, depending on income.

***SNAP dramatically reduces food insecurity*** for families juggling multiple low-wage jobs, high housing costs, childcare expenses, and more. It is also an important lifeline for people with disabilities, young adults aging out of foster care who are vulnerable to homelessness, veterans, and military families on the lower end of the pay scale.

## Major Federal Changes

The 2025 law (H.R. 1) cuts **\$187 billion** nationwide from SNAP by 2034 through:

- **State cost-sharing for benefits (starting 2028):** For the first time in 60+ years, states must pay **up to 15%** of food benefit costs, depending on administrative error rates. Minnesota could face **\$86+ million annually**.
- **Expanded work reporting requirements:** New paperwork rules for adults 55–64, parents of teens, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and youth aging out of foster care. These are barriers that often **cause eligible people to lose help**.
- **Reduced future benefit value:** Changes will lower purchasing power over time.
- **Higher administrative costs:** States must implement complex changes, as the federal government reduces its share of administrative costs from 50% to 25%.
- **Elimination of SNAP-Ed:** Loss of community nutrition education and food-budgeting programs.
- **Loss of eligibility for some lawfully present immigrants:** Including refugees and survivors of trafficking or domestic violence.

## Impact on Minnesota

- Hundreds of thousands of people may see reduced or lost benefits.
- State and county budgets face tens of millions of dollars in new costs.
- Food shelves and charities will see even higher demand than they currently face.
- Local economies lose grocery spending supported by federal SNAP dollars. (\$1 of SNAP = \$1.80 local economic benefit)

## How Hunger Will Increase

Research shows SNAP increases food security while cuts lead to:

- More skipped meals and poorer nutrition
- Increased child hunger, developmental risks, and poor school performance
- Worse health outcomes and higher medical costs
- Greater strain on counties, community programs, and food banks.

Because benefits are already small, even modest reductions significantly increase hardship.



## Sources:

MN Senate Rules Committee: Subcommittee on Federal Impacts – Hearings on SNAP Cuts (Fall 2025) – A 5-minute summary video of hearing highlights is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPntAZ54Vm0>

Food Research and Action Council (FRAC) – Many articles available. FRAC Fact Sheet on SNAP Strengths available here: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-Facts-SNAP-Strengths-2025.pdf>

Feeding America - The Map the Meal Gap project has an interactive map with county level info. at <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/minnesota>

Urban Institute – Several articles in Urban Wire, including one that addresses impacts on young adults

Minnesota Budget Project – Articles about SNAP & Medicaid Cuts, and sign-on letter calling for bold response in legislature (LA-MN signed on) LA-MN Director, Tammy Walhof, also has decades of experience on SNAP issues at the federal level & its impact for Upper Midwest families

# SNAP Cut & Food Security Policy Options

## Protect Access by Reducing Administrative Barriers – no bill numbers yet

Ensures eligible Minnesotans actually receive available help and limits new state costs tied to error rates.

- Invest in county staffing, technology, and eligibility systems to minimize paperwork errors and penalties.
- Fund community navigators to help residents meet new federal reporting requirements.
- Simplify processes to reduce “churn” (eligible people losing benefits due to paperwork).

## Stabilize Food Assistance Through State Investment – no bill numbers yet

Prevents sharp increases in hunger while maintaining program stability.

- Cover Minnesota’s new federal SNAP cost-sharing requirement to prevent deeper benefit reductions.
- Provide a **state-funded food benefit supplement** for households most affected by federal cuts.
- Create a **budget reserve or contingency fund** to stabilize food assistance during economic downturns.

## Strengthen Food Shelves & Local Food Systems – no bill numbers yet

Charitable food systems will face rising demand as SNAP shrinks.

- Increase funding for food banks, food shelves, and prepared meal programs.
- Expand Farm-to-Food Shelf and local purchasing initiatives.
- Support mobile food distribution in rural and underserved communities.

## Address Root Causes of Food Insecurity (see policy agendas of Homes for All & other coalitions)

Food insecurity is closely tied to housing costs and income volatility.

- Expand housing stability programs, child care assistance, and refundable tax credits.
- Support workforce and wage policies that improve household stability.

# Talking Points & Sample Letter: Food Security

### Legislative “Ask”:

Please support Food Security by

- **Protecting access** for eligible people and **reducing administrative barriers** to limit penalties related to error rates,
- **Stabilize food assistance** with **state investments** to fill the gaps created by new cost-sharing requirements,
- **Strengthen funding** for food shelves & local food systems, and
- **Address the root causes** of food insecurity.

### Possible Talking Points (choose a couple):

- As a Christian I believe God calls us collectively as a society to make sure people have enough to eat.
- Churches, charities, & local governments can’t cover the cuts.
- Children cannot learn well in school when they are hungry.
- Seniors and people with disabilities deserve access to food.
- SNAP supports grocery stores, farms, & local economies.
- Hunger increases stress and mental health challenges for families.
- Hardworking families shouldn’t fall behind because of federal cuts.
- Food access strengthens communities and reduces inequality.
- Good nutrition improves long-term health & reduces medical costs.
- Administrative barriers shouldn’t hurt eligible people & families.
- Food security helps people stay employed and financially stable.
- Policies that reduce poverty strengthen the entire state.
- Ensuring access to food is a basic moral responsibility.

### Example (please use your own words)

Date
Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),
I’m deeply concerned about the massive cuts to SNAP, one of the most effective federal programs. Moving funding responsibility to the states is irresponsible federal policy, but given the looming hunger disaster, our state needs to find ways to step up appropriately.
My church, Faith Lutheran of Lovelytown, MN, has been engaged with our local foodshelf for decades, and we’ve seen needs increase exponentially as inflation, high housing costs, and low wages take their toll.
Please protect access to SNAP for eligible people with community/non-profit navigators to help folks navigate new rules, and work to reduce administrative errors with appropriate systems & technology. Also, the state is going to need to make significant state investments to offset cost shifts from the federal government and help charities fill gaps. Finally, don’t forget that hunger has root causes related to housing & more.
Name
Address

# Issue: Electronic Waste Recycling

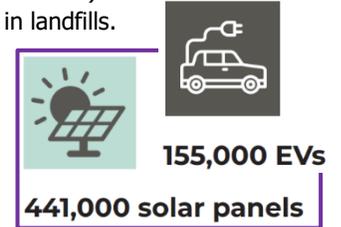
**The Problem:** Electronic waste (e-waste) is the fastest-growing waste stream in the world, increasing 3–5% annually. Yet most household electronics and batteries can be recycled.

- Minnesota generates **266 million pounds** of e-waste each year. Only **about 24%** is currently recycled.
- E-waste is only 1-2% of MN's waste stream, but accounts for more than **70% of landfill toxins**, creating risks to water, air, and public health.
- Lithium **batteries** in discarded electronics can **cause fires** in waste trucks, facilities, and landfills.
- County and municipal government **costs increase** when managing fire, contamination, and waste management challenges. This ultimately **increases taxpayer burdens**.
- Residents and businesses often must **pay fees** and travel long distances to recycle responsibly.



**Economic Opportunity:** Recent analysis estimates that if **100% of Minnesota's e-waste** were recovered:

- **68 recoverable minerals and metals** could be reclaimed (such as copper, lithium, gold, & silver)
- These materials could support domestic manufacturing supply chains, instead of being lost in landfills.
- Recovered silver could supply 441,000 solar panels, and copper 155,000 electric vehicles.
- **\$2.8 billion** in economic value could be generated
- Nearly **1,740 direct jobs** could be created (plus additional indirect jobs)



## Outdated Law & Recent Legislative Efforts:

- Minnesota's **Electronics Recycling Act (2007)** no longer reflects today's technology.
  - Written before smartphones, Bluetooth devices, and many lithium-battery products became common.
  - Collection has dropped from **40 million pounds at its peak** to about **20 million pounds** annually.
  - Limited collection sites and consumer fees remain major barriers.
- In 2023, a broad coalition of faith, environmental, and community organizations began work to update the law.
- In 2024, modernization legislation, including a small implementation fee on electronics sales, faced retailer opposition.
- In 2025, replacing fees with **manufacturer responsibility**, garnered **broad bipartisan legislator support**.
- **Lutheran Letter Campaign efforts were noticed** by the lead Senate author, as other legislators asked about the bill due to constituent letters.
- Numerous **industry lobbyists mobilized** shortly before the first Senate hearing, resulting in **withdrawal** of three key Senate co-authors, the primary House author **not advancing the bill for hearings**, and the **proposal stalling**.

## 2026 Efforts:

- Bills are being refined after a second round of stakeholder feedback. Two primary opposition groups are electronics manufacturers & battery industry representatives.
- A major retailer continues to oppose the electronics bill despite earlier negotiations and revisions.
- Some industry proposals could significantly weaken program effectiveness.
- Implementation discussions include whether industry self-policing or state enforcement should be used.
- Economic benefits remain strong if high collection rates are achieved.



## Sources:

1. Maria Jensen: Repowered (Environment, Health, & Safety); Recycling Electronics for Climate Action (RECA); Areas of Study: Public Health (Research Methods); Environmental Toxicology & Public Health. Presentations: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster; [Ely Tuesday Group](#)
2. Lucy Mullany: Eureka Recycling. Presentations/Discussions: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster
3. Jensen, Maria; Roopali Phadke; Keith Steva; Marlise Riffel. "[The Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling in Minnesota: A Pilot Study.](#)" Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability; Repowered; Macalester College. August 2023.
4. "[Harnessing the Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling: A New MN Study.](#)" Repowered.
5. Smieja, Jon. "[The Enormous Opportunity of E-Waste Recycling.](#)" World Economic Forum. March 24, 2023.

# 2026 Electronic Waste Proposals

## Electronics Stewardship Program Establishment Bill – SF 1690 (Senate)/ HF 1426 (House)

- Same bill as last year, with possible amendments forthcoming (we were calling it the E-Waste Recycling Bill)
- **Updates the definition of e-waste** to all common household electronic devices, including electronics with circuit boards and electronics with battery or batteries built into item
- Provides **free, convenient statewide collection** for residents and businesses.
- Requires **manufacturers to fund recycling costs** proportional to their market share.
- Establishes **program administration** through a **board of manufacturers or a nonprofit** they select, under the broad oversight of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- **Exclusions:**
  - Lead-acid batteries (already have about 95% recovery)
  - Electric vehicles and infrastructure (separate systems)
  - Household appliances (like refrigerators, washers, dryers, air fryers, etc.)

## Stand-Alone Battery Recycling Bill – no bill numbers yet

- Will address loose consumer batteries (removable batteries purchased separately)
- Based on model legislation from the **PRBA (Portable Rechargeable Battery Association)** which is the main U.S. battery industry association.
- Complementary to the Electronic Stewardship Bill

## Talking Points & Sample Letter: E-Waste

### Legislative “Ask”:

Please support SF1690 (Senate)/HF1426 (House) **and** the new complementary loose battery bill to

- Update the electronics definition
- Provide for **statewide free e-waste drop-off**
- Require **manufacturers to pay the recycling collection costs** for e-waste (like other programs also managed by the MPCA)

### Possible Talking Points (choose a couple):

- I believe we must be good stewards of all that God has created.
- E-waste leaches toxins into our water and air.
- Anything with a lithium battery is a fire hazard in the trash, including air pods, singing cards, and e-cigarettes.
- The 2007 Minnesota Electronics Recycling Act is out of date as many new technologies are not covered or collected.
- Research shows that people are more likely to turn in old electronics and batteries if drop-off sites are free and accessible.
- Electronic waste contains high value metals like copper, platinum, silver, gold, & iron that can and should be recycled.
- Of 266 million pounds of e-waste produced in Minnesota annually, only about 24% gets collected and recycled.
- The minerals in Minnesota’s e-waste would be worth 2.8 billion annually if captured and recycled.
- In moving from fossil fuels toward cleaner options to address the climate crisis, these minerals are increasing in demand.
- Recycling (or mining) of e-waste could add more than 1700 jobs

### Example (please use your own words)

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Dear Rep. \_\_\_\_\_ (or Sen. \_\_\_\_\_),

We’ve been learning about e-waste at our church (2<sup>nd</sup> Lutheran, Lovelytown) & want to be able to recycle our old electronics. Putting them in the trash is a fire and health hazard, as toxins leach into our water and air.

There aren’t any electronic drop-off sites in this part of the state, and even where there are, not all electronics are collected or recycled. Only about 24% of 266 million pounds of e-waste annually produced in MN are collected, recycled, and reused due to outdated laws.

Please support HF 1426 (or SF 1690), to create an Electronic Device Stewardship Program. Please also support the new Battery Collection & Recycling Bill. It’s time to update & expand the definition of e-waste, provide accessible and free drop-off or collection, and have manufacturers pay the cost of collection.

The minerals and metals in e-waste are increasingly in demand as the world works to move away from fossil fuels. Not only that, it could be an economic boon for Minnesota, worth \$2.8 billion annually and creating more than 1700 jobs statewide.

Thank you!  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

# Issue: Ethical Immigration Enforcement

## SITUATION

Beginning in December 2025, the Trump Administration launched "Operation Metro Surge," a **massive immigration enforcement action in Minnesota** targeting first the Twin Cities and expanding statewide. With **3000 federal agents**, it is described as the **largest such operation in US history**, claiming as its aim to apprehend immigrants with alleged criminal records or visa violations. It **follows intense rhetoric** regarding Minnesota's immigrant population, particularly **the Somali community**, but has been **targeted toward any "suspected" immigrant** (based on appearance, accent, place of work, location, etc.).

## FAITH MESSAGES on Immigration Enforcement in Minnesota

**\*Drawn from the statements made by Bishop Yehiel Curry and the Minnesota bishops (jointly and individually)**

**1. Human Dignity Rooted in Faith** – We believe **every person is created in the image of God** and is a beloved child of God, **regardless of immigration status**. Our faith calls us to love the stranger as ourselves, to seek justice, and to defend those who are vulnerable. ***Policies and enforcement practices must reflect the God-given dignity of all people.***

**2. Grief, Lament, and Moral Witness** – We **grieve the violence, fear, and suffering** in our communities. We lament families being torn apart and neighbors living in fear. Lament is faithful, naming what is wrong while trusting that God is present with us in the midst of pain. Our ***faith compels us to speak when injustice harms our neighbors.***



**3. Fear and Harm in Communities** – We see the **fear and trauma that aggressive enforcement has created** for families, children, congregations, and entire neighborhoods. No community should live under constant threat. We are **concerned by the racial profiling and indiscriminate targeting** of black and brown neighbors and immigrants.

**4. Accountability and the Rule of Law** – We call for **transparency, accountability, and justice**. The use of force by federal agents must be independently investigated, and violations of due process must have consequences. Public safety depends on trust, and ***trust requires that law enforcement respect the rights and dignity of every person.***

**5. Opposition to Escalated Enforcement and Harmful Detention** – We believe **excessive enforcement and detention practices harm communities** and violate moral responsibility. Indiscriminate arrests, unsafe detention conditions, and the detention of children are not consistent with human dignity. ***Resources should be directed toward humane and just solutions*** that strengthen the common good.



**6. Protection of Sacred and Community Spaces** – We affirm that **houses of worship and other essential community spaces should be places of safety, not fear**. People should never be prevented from worship, seeking medical care, attending school, or accessing the courts because they fear immigration enforcement.

**7. Support for Refugees and Lawfully Present Immigrants** – We **affirm the promises made to refugees and immigrants** who were welcomed into this country. Reopening cases, detaining lawfully present people, and destabilizing families contradict commitments to protection and hospitality. We ***remain committed to welcoming our neighbors.***

**8. Christian Identity and Spiritual Grounding** – Our baptismal identity reminds us that **we are God's beloved, and so are our neighbors**. We are grounded in Scripture, prayer, worship, and community as we face difficult times. This ***spiritual foundation gives us courage to act*** with compassion and conviction.

**9. Commitment to Action and Solidarity** – We commit ourselves to pray, to advocate, and to act alongside those most affected. **We will show up for our neighbors with love**, provide care and support, and work for policies that reflect justice and mercy. ***Faith calls us not only to belief, but to action.***

**10. Hope and Perseverance** – We do not grow weary in seeking justice and peace. Our **hope is rooted in Christ**, not in circumstances. We trust that **love is stronger than fear, community is stronger than division, and justice is stronger than cruelty**. God is with us, and we are not alone.



## BACKGROUND

**What is ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement):** A federal law enforcement agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), created in 2003 after the 9/11 attacks.

Its main roles include:

- Enforcing immigration laws inside the United States (arrests, detention, deportation)
- Investigating cross-border crime
- Managing the civil immigration detention system
- **Working closely with CBP** which is **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** (tasked with security at borders and ports of entry).

**Federal Funding Changes (2025 Reconciliation Bill):** In July 2025, Congress passed H.R. 1 (called by some the "Big Beautiful Bill" and signed by President Donald Trump) provides, among other provisions, **\$170.7 billion** for immigration and border enforcement through 2029, an amount beyond the regular appropriations process.

Major funding increases include:

- **\$45 billion** for expanding immigration detention (potentially more than 100,000 beds)
- **\$29.9 billion** for ICE arrests, deportation operations, and hiring 10,000 new officers
- **\$51.6 billion** for border wall and facilities / **Capped immigration judges** at 800 despite backlogs (& 25% decrease)
- **Billions for state cooperation** with federal immigration enforcement

Funds passed through budget reconciliation include **limited oversight requirements**, giving agencies broad discretion.

### Minnesota Lawsuits and Reports:

- More than **80 Minnesotans filed sworn declarations** in federal court alleging excessive force, intimidation, and violations of constitutional rights by federal immigration agents.
- The American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota reports **700+ complaints** of misconduct by Federal agents in Minnesota, including more than 200 from mid-January through mid-February, 2026.

#### Main Allegations



- **Racial profiling & wrongful detention** – U.S citizens detained due to appearance or accent; Stops or questioning based on neighborhood or perceived immigration status
- **Detention concerns** – Reports of detainees denied medication, food, or access to attorneys; Transfers out of state without notice to family members.
- **Use of excessive force** - Tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades, and physical force against legal observers and protesters; Intimidation tactics, including following individuals or referencing personal information.
- **Violations of constitutional rights** - Targeting journalists, legal observers, and people documenting enforcement; Treating protected speech or protest activity as obstruction.
- **Court orders violated** – Nearly 100 court orders violated by federal agents in MN by Jan. 28, 2026.

**\*Federal officials deny wrongdoing and say force is used only when necessary.** Observer videos suggest otherwise.

### Impacted Minnesota ELCA Congregation

- **Two asylum seeker members deported** to Venezuela without due process for their asylum claims.
- **One member detained was released in Texas**, not returned to Minnesota. He's waiting for a hearing there that may lead to deportation (hearings have been administrative hearings, not judicial hearings with immigration judges).
- **Another member** was detained and **10 days after the court ordered his release** he was **still in detention**.
- **Member** from Venezuela, entered the U.S. legally in 2024 and was applying for her green card. She has no criminal record and is the mother of a 6-year-old son.
  - After receiving a letter to appear at an immigration office in January 2026, she expected a routine appointment. Instead, she was detained and flown to Texas within hours.

#### Conditions

- Denied her diabetes medication / Prevented from showering or brushing her teeth.
- No contact with her family or attorney for days. / Shackled at the ankles for extended periods.
- Limited food - went 24 hours without eating.
- Held with dozens of women in crowded rooms without proper clothing or beds.
- Forced to relive traumatic experiences from Venezuela during 7-hour long interview (no food was offered during questioning for her or her pastor who was translating) / Feared for her life and her son's wellbeing.
- Although now released, she continues to feel unsafe and fears being detained again, especially without her documents returned.



## Legal Constitutional Observers in Minnesota

- Around **30,000 people trained** as constitutional observers in **77 of 87 Minnesota counties**, including unexpected places according to ELCA lay participants (350+ in Moorhead, close to 600 in Washington County)
- Observers go to where ICE or Border Patrol is operating, and record what agents are doing.
- Videos show that **observers** some distance away **have had agents run up on them, spray them in the face with pepper spray, tackle them, or deploy flash-bangs and chemical irritants**, alleging observers' are obstructing (This has happened even to quiet Lutheran observers in their 70s or 80s)
- Observers **recorded the deaths** of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, showing contrasting evidence to DHS statements.



### Sources:

**Statements:** Observer Patty O'Keefe, MN ELCA Bishops, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Chief U.S. District Judge Patrick Schiltz, ACLU of MN  
**Minnesota News Outlets:** MinnPost, MPR News, KARE11 News, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, FOX 9 News, WCCO News, Bring Me The News, Sahan Journal, KSTP 5 Eyewitness News, MN Reformer

**National News Outlets/Organizations:** AP News, CNN, NPR News, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Newsweek, The Atlantic, POLITICO, Democracy Now, The Washington Post, NBC News, FOX News, American Immigration Council, CATO Institute, Brennen Center for Justice, TIME, CBS 60 Minutes, Amesty International, ELCA Churchwide & ELCA Advocacy

**Other:** Pastor & congregants of ELCA immigrant congregation, ELCA pastors, former detainees, asylum seekers, permanent residents, refugees. [LA-MN director Tammy Walhof has read, skimmed, and saved links to 800+ news articles, statements, & press releases; watched innumerable observer videos, interviews, news broadcasts; closely followed social media of pastors impacted or engaged; spoken with various immigrant friends]

## Ethical Immigration Enforcement Options

### Sensitive Locations Protection – *No comprehensive bills yet / H.F. 3435 addresses only schools*

In 2025, the **federal government rescinded protection for sensitive places** like churches, schools, and hospitals. allowing agents broader discretion. Although **states** may not directly block federal officers from enforcing immigration law, they **do have the authority to regulate** state and local entities, use of state resources, access to state-controlled property, and public safety standards and coordination with federal actors

State legislation to **protect community spaces** should

- 1) Require judicial warrants or authorization to enter or operate near 1) houses of worship, 2) schools and childcare centers, 3) hospitals & health clinics, 4) courthouses, 5) domestic violence shelters and social service agencies.
- 2) Include civil penalties for violations.

This does not prohibit federal action but does protect public safety. States routinely regulate access to their own facilities.

### Trauma Support for Children and Families – *no bills yet*

**Mental health services**, including **trauma or PTSD counseling** is needed for people who have been detained and their families, as well as for immigrant families who have been scared to leave their homes, missing work, and foregoing normal daily activities, **regardless of their status** (even for immigrant citizens). **Schools where children have gone missing** or which have had students learning virtually should be provided the **resources needed for counseling of all the children** to process the disruptions, anxiety, and trauma they have experienced as immigrant children or classmates and friends.

State legislation should provide **resources, funding, and/or counseling** programs that include **culturally and age-appropriate care**.

### Independent State Review of Use-of-Force Incidents – *no bills yet*

When someone is seriously injured or killed during a federal law enforcement action in Minnesota, an **independent state entity** like the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension should do a **thorough review of the evidence and situation**. This would fit Minnesota's tradition of independent investigations and responds directly to concerns raised following the recent shootings. Harm caused by "riot control agents" (RCAs) like chemicals and flash-bang grenades should also be examined.

This should be a **focus on accountability and appropriate law enforcement**, rather than on immigration policy.

*(Bills as of February 17, 2026)*

# Talking Points & Sample Ltr: Ethical Enforcement

## Legislative "Ask":

Please support policies which

- 1) **Protect Community Spaces** like houses of worship, schools and childcare centers, hospitals & health clinics, courthouses, domestic violence shelters and social service agencies by requiring **judicial warrants** or authorization and assigning **civil penalties** if violated.
- 2) **Provide Trauma Support** for Children & Families which is culturally and age appropriate.
- 3) Require **Independent Review of Use-of-Force Incidents**.

## Possible Talking Points (choose 2 or 3, or write your own):

- Humans are created in God's image, and policies should respect the worth of every person, regardless of immigration status.
- Community stability benefits the economy.
- Healthy, educated, and secure families contribute more fully to local communities.
- Protecting safe community spaces reflects compassion and moral responsibility.
- Children's education shouldn't be disrupted by enforcement actions.
- Everyone should be able to pray, learn, and get medical care without fear. Fear keeps people away from essential services that benefit the whole community.
- Schools, churches, and hospitals have their own missions that should remain the priority.
- Healthy, educated, and secure families contribute more fully to local communities.
- Trauma affects entire classrooms, not just individual families.
- Early mental health support prevents long-term costs. Treating trauma now reduces future spending on healthcare, special education, and crisis services.
- Fear and trauma affect citizens, permanent residents, and mixed-status families alike.
- People are more likely to seek help when services respect language and culture.
- Mental health access supports law enforcement and first responders by reducing crisis situations.
- Providing care reflects compassion rather than division, values shared across faith traditions.
- Independent review builds public trust, regardless of the outcome.
- Minnesota already uses independent investigations for officer-involved shootings. This extends an existing standard.
- Independent review strengthens the rule of law, which benefits everyone.
- Reviewing use of chemical agents and flash-bangs protects public health, including bystanders and journalists.
- Oversight is a core conservative principle — government power should be accountable.
- Good law enforcement depends on community trust, which independent review helps maintain.

## Example (please use your own words)

Date
Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),
I'm a Christian and believe that all people are created in the image of God AND are worthy of dignity. I'm deeply concerned about the dehumanizing ways that federal agents have been treating our immigrant neighbors, and those who stand up for them. Here in Lovelytown, we haven't been as directly impacted, but we see the news and videos, and our church has been collecting aid for families here and elsewhere.
While I recognize that state policy options are limited, since enforcement is a federal role, there is some legislation that you should work to enact. First, we need the state to Protect Community Spaces by requiring judicial authorization to enter or operate near churches, schools, hospitals, domestic violence shelters, etc. There should be civil penalties or consequences for violations! We also need trauma support for children and families, which is culturally and age appropriate. This includes counseling for all schoolkids where classmates have disappeared or been impacted, since trauma affects entire classrooms.
Finally, we believe that it is important for Minnesota to require independent review of "use of force" incidents. That is something that our own BCA could do. As part of this, the use of chemical agents and flash-bangs should be reviewed for the harm it causes people whether they are observers, protesters, or people who live near the places they are used.
Taking actions like these will build trust. They could bring some degree of healing and hopefully reduce tensions or divisions.
Thank you! Name Address

**God, help us to recognize your presence in the refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers who flee from their places of birth, seeking safety and welcome in our nation and our communities. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**-from Global Refuge**